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**Re:** Bronwyn Hegarty, Ethics application 396

16 November 2007

Research Ethics Committee
Private Bag 1910
Otago Polytechnic, Dunedin

Dear Committee members

Thank you for the feedback on the ethics application 396. Please find attached the survey, information sheet, consent form and confidentiality statement. There is more detail further on about the focus group sessions. Our response to the committee's suggestions follow.

## 1. Survey - attached

We have not been provided a copy of the survey to gather demographic data and investigate aspects of digital network literacy and self-efficacy. Please send us a copy. It is also not clear if these surveys are, for example, returned anonymously, completed on line, intended to be linked to the assessment data, or will be initially analysed by the researchers/course facilitators or the external interviewer researcher.

- The participants will be asked to add their name to the survey so an holistic overview of how "strategies, which are used to promote network learning and engagement in learning communities, influence participants' digital network literacy and level of self-efficacy for eLearning." (p11, ethics application 396). This will be coded for the purposes of analysis.

- The survey will be offered online using Otago Polytechnic's survey tool, and analysed by the Organisational Research Officer at Otago Polytechnic (this has yet to be negotiated).

## 2. Focus groups

We also do not have the semi structured questions for the interviewer to use in the focus groups. These may not have yet been developed until the questionnaire is completed, but if more information is available about the intent than outlined in the participant information form (*The purpose of the focus group will be to explore aspects of your experience participating in the course and your perceptions of your own digital network literacy and self-efficacy in eLearning* section) the Committee would like to see it.

We are not clear how the focus groups will be conducted. In the absence of any statement that this is not the case we have assumed that these will be conducted in the standard way, i.e. face to face. Should the project intend to undertake the focus groups some other way, e.g. via the internet or by teleconference, we would wish to see further information about the arrangements.

You are correct in assuming that the focus group questions cannot be pre-prepared fully and will be developed after data is collected using the questionnaire. As mentioned previously, these will be semi-structured and when conducted with the

participants, face-to-face, we hope to draw on information obtained in the survey responses around digital network literacy and self-efficacy. It will also be an exploration of people's experiences of participating in the course which are directly related to digital information literacy and being part of a networked community as well as their confidence in using the strategies for interacting online in the course. For example, if respondents in the survey state for one of the questions from the survey:

**Part B: Digital Information literacy**
1. **Your assessment of your own digital information literacy skills and needs**
"With regard to my study or work, I am moving into situations which require me to apply increasingly sophisticated, information-gathering skills in increasingly demanding academic contexts."

- we would be asking a general Q (not singling out the actual respondent) how they are doing this, and did participation in DFLP, help them to develop their digital information literacy skills for "increasingly demanding academic contexts".

Using the transcriptions of the focus group we would hope to be able to extend our picture of the digital information literacy and self-efficacy levels of the group as a whole rather than linking to specific individuals. We are looking for evidence of progression participants in general have in these two areas as a result of participating in the DFLP network which is still active.

The facilitators will also take part in a focus group with an external facilitator who has yet to be recruited. This will be a debriefing session about "the process of designing, developing and teaching the course" and whether we met the eLearning Guidelines:
- TD11 - Should staff use a team approach to develop and teach the course?
- TD12 - Is the design of learning informed by research on effective eLearning?
- TO9 - Are staff encouraged to participate in networks and learning communities involved in reviewing, developing or sharing good practice in the use of e-learning?

We will be careful not to mention participants by name during the focus group as the purpose is to draw out our perspectives and not critique individuals' performance.

2. **Assessments**
Because the assessment will have been marked by the researcher/facilitator we assume that the assessment cannot be analysed anonymously, and therefore request that you make a clear statement in the information sheets about who will analyse the assessments and whether the specific data from this will be matched to the demographic and self efficacy data. We note that no matching to the focus group transcriptions is possible or intended.

We have some concern around the project asking to see participants' assessments after the event, i.e. they will not have written them with the knowledge they would be used for research. We would like it made explicit that the participants can complete the survey and join the focus group but not provide you the assessment, if that is their preference. Please amend the information sheet and consent form accordingly.

When looking at the assessments we will be looking for evidence of engagement in "networks and learning communities to review, develop or share good practice in the use of e-learning". Therefore only the assessments which are publicly available will

be relevant to this research. We will not be analysing the assessments for content rather for evidence of networked learning i.e. communication/interaction with a community of learners both in the class and outside the class, and also digital information literacy. It is important that two of the course facilitators conduct this analysis as they are probably the most qualified to do this – Bronwyn Hegarty and Leigh Blackall.

I would like to ask the participants in the information sheet and consent form whether they agree to have any part of their assessments quoted anonymously or not (their choice) in the research findings. This has been added, along with your suggestions.

### 3. 4. What data or information will be collected and how will it be used?

Currently the section *What data or information will be collected and how will it be used?* only provides information on how the data will be placed in to the public domain. Please be specific about any data matching that will link the demographic data and the assessments.

Data collected from the surveys, focus groups and assessments will be used to determine whether the design and implementation of the DFLP course met the three eLearning guidelines mentioned in the previous section. The data will help form a holistic picture of how "strategies, which are used to promote network learning and engagement in learning communities, influence participants' digital network literacy and level of self-efficacy for eLearning." (p11, ethics application, 396). This will be presented as a case study of the course, not as individual case studies so there will be no linking to individuals in any of the findings or reports or presentations about the findings. The survey responses will need to be linked to the course assessments because they were structured to promote "digital network literacy".

### 4. Transcriber and research assistant

We are not clear who will undertake the transcription. Given the careful way you have identified a research associate will be involved in the focus groups we would like to see a similar statement about the transcriber. Please also provide a copy of the confidentially agreement such a transcriber will be asked to sign.

We are not clear if the transcriber and/or the associate researcher will be external to the institution or merely external to the teaching team. Please clarify the independence and, for the associate researcher, the level of research expertise they will have. It may be that this is the role of the colleague academic from Massey but this is not specified.

A confidentiality statement is attached. We are planning to recruit an external transcriber who has previously done transcribing for Bronwyn Hegarty for her Doctorate and also for another member of staff (that I know of) at Otago Polytechnic. This person is very reliable and confidential and works outside Otago Polytechnic.

A research assistant who is currently working at the Massey Wellington campus as a research assistant will be asked to do literature searching **only** as this project will require similar material to that being sourced for the "umbrella" project under which this smaller project sits. To interview facilitators and participants in separate focus groups, we have recruited Joanna Cobley from Christchurch, University of Canterbury who has conducted interviews for one of the FLLinNZ3 (Flexible Learning Leaders in NZ3) projects. She also interviews and podcasts for the Museum Detective series – see: http://museumdetective.com (Joanna Cobley, Ph.D. Gender Studies, 2003. University of Canterbury, New Zealand.)

**See "**an independent interviewer will be used to conduct focus groups with participants and also to facilitate the focus group where the facilitators discuss the course amongst themselves".

**Reference**

Hegarty, B., Penman, M., Nichols, M., Brown, C., Hayden-Clarke, J., Gower, B., Kelly, O. & Moore, M. (2005). *Approaches and implicationsof eLearning adoption on academic staff efficacy and working practice: An annotated bibliography*. Ministry of Education, Wellington, New Zealand. Available at: http://cms.steo.govt.nz/NR/rdonlyres/89765CF4-A2ED-4088-9AE5-0097F7E7324C/0/ALETliteraturereview.pdf

Yours sincerely

Bronwyn Hegarty
Educational Developer